

AGENDA

- I. Welcome
- II. Introduction to Vocabulary Words
- III. Definition of Attachment
- IV. Cycle of Attachment
 - A. Healthy Attachment Cycle
 - B. Disturbed Attachment Cycle
- V. Barriers to Attachment
- VI. Negative Attachments
 - A. Disturbed Attachments
 - B. Attachment Trauma
 - C. Trauma Related Attachment Problems
- VII. Parenting Children with Attachment Disturbances
- VIII. Summary

VOCABULARY

Attachment – an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally

Attachment disorder – occurs when “normal” attachment does not take place, caused by traumatic relationships which includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect

Bonding – a uniting force or tie (family bonds)

Detachment – an inability to accept and resolve issues, which creates a lasting inability to become emotionally involved with other people

Specific Problems in Maltreated Children with Attachment Problems

Developmental delays: Children experiencing emotional neglect in early childhood often have developmental delay in other domains. The bond between the young child and caregivers provides the major vehicle for developing physically, emotionally, and cognitively. It is in this primary context that children learn language, social behaviors, and a host of other key behaviors required for healthy development. Lack of consistent and enriched experiences in early childhood can result in delays in motor, language, social, and cognitive development.

Eating: Odd eating behaviors are common, especially in children with severe neglect and attachment problems. They will hoard food, hide food in their rooms, eat as if there will be no more meals even if they have had years of consistent available foods. They may have failure to thrive, rumination (throwing up of food), swallowing problems and, later in life, odd eating behaviors that are often misdiagnosed as anorexia nervosa.

Soothing behavior: These children will use very primitive, immature and bizarre soothing behaviors. They may bite themselves, head bang, rock, chant, scratch or cut themselves. These symptoms will increase during times of distress or threat.

Emotional functioning: A range of emotional problems is common in these children including depressive and anxiety symptoms. One common behavior is “indiscriminant” attachment. All children seek safety. Keeping in mind that attachment is important for survival, children may seek attachments – any attachments – for their safety. Abused and neglected children are usually “loving” and hug virtual strangers. Children do not develop a deep emotional bond with relatively unknown people, rather, these “affectionate” behaviors are actually safety seeking behaviors. These behaviors often contribute to the abused child’s confusion about intimacy and are not consistent with normal social interactions.

Inappropriate modeling: Children model adult behavior – even if it is abusive. They learn that abusive behavior is the “right” way to interact with others. As you can see, this potentially causes problems in their social interactions with adults and other children. For children that have been sexually abused, they may become more at risk for future victimization. Males that have been sexually abused may become sexual offenders.

Aggression: One of the major problems with these children is aggression and cruelty. This is related to two primary problems in neglected children: (1) lack of empathy and (2) poor impulse control. The ability to emotionally understand the impact of your behavior on others is impaired in these children. They really do not understand or feel what it is like for others when they do or say something hurtful. Indeed, these children often feel compelled to lash out and hurt others – most typically at something less powerful than they are. They will hurt animals, smaller children, peers and siblings. One of the most disturbing elements of this aggression is that it is often accompanied by a detached, cold lack of empathy. They may show regret (an intellectual response) but not remorse (an emotional response when confronted about their aggressive or cruel behaviors.)

Indicators of Attachment Issues

Note: This list can also be partially attributed to ADHD or other diagnoses. It is important to understand the complexities of dealing with children and how difficult it is to "simply diagnose."

1. Superficially engaging and charming
2. Lack of eye contact on adult terms
3. Indiscriminately affectionate with strangers
4. Not affectionate on caregiver's terms
5. Destructive to self, others and material items (accident prone)
6. Cruelty to animals
7. Lying about the obvious
8. Stealing
9. No impulse control (can appear hyperactive)
10. Learning lags
11. Lack of cause and effect thinking
12. Lack of conscience
13. Abnormal eating patterns
14. Poor peer relations
15. Preoccupation with fire
16. Preoccupation with blood and gore
17. Persistent nonsense questions and incessant chatter
18. Inappropriately demanding and clingy
19. Abnormal Speech patterns

How to Encourage Attachment

- ✓ Eye contact: warm, loving, soft
- ✓ Touch: Unrehearsed appropriate touches
- ✓ Movement: Rocking, bouncing
- ✓ Smiles: the smile in the eyes is the child's focus
- ✓ Sing a favorite song together
- ✓ Do chores together in a fun way
- ✓ Respond to the child when they are not feeling well.
- ✓ Help the child to express and cope with feelings of anger and frustration
- ✓ Share in the excitement that the child has over his/her achievements
- ✓ Help the child to cope with feelings about moving
- ✓ Start working with the child to create a life book
- ✓ Read to the child
- ✓ Play games with the child
- ✓ Go on special outings with the child – park, plays, picnics, etc.
- ✓ Help the child with his/her homework
- ✓ Teach the child to cook and/or bake
- ✓ Help the child to understand family jokes and sayings
- ✓ Teach the child to participate in family activities such as camping, swimming, or biking
- ✓ Hang pictures of the child on the wall
- ✓ Include the child in family rituals
- ✓ Create a family ritual including the child.
- ✓ Avoid control battles! Control battles are lose-lose. Try win-win approaches like... “When you do this, then I’ll do that”

The Pinocchio Principle

From... "Connections", Association for Treatment and Training In the Attachment of Children newsletter, February 1998 (Printed in Horizon Institute Handbook, April 2000)

"...When children who were naughty become good, it gives a new smiling appearance to the whole family."

That quote from Pinocchio is what I wish for all families parenting hurt children. And since every cause needs a mascot, after rereading the tale of Pinocchio and watching Disney's version I wholeheartedly nominate Pinocchio. Although most of us remember his nose growing as he lies, it was not until I reviewed the movie that the striking similarities between the tale and parenting a child with attachment disorder jumped out at me.

First there is Geppetto, a kindly, lonely, single father whose only wish is to have Pinocchio be "a real boy," to fill his life with joy. The fairy (social worker) brings Pinocchio, and says "to make Geppetto's wish come true will be entirely up to you..." "Prove yourself brave, truthful, and unselfish, and you will be a real boy." It's not exactly the respectful, responsible, and fun-to-be with quoted in attachment therapy, but close. But does Pinocchio listen? No. Pinocchio, although not a real boy, becomes mobile, and in his first dance (that honeymoon ended quickly) kicks Figaro, the cat (cruelty to animals), sets a fire, burns his finger (self-injurious), and pollutes the fish's bowl (destructive to property). As they try to sleep, Pinocchio asks questions about sleep, school, why? (persistent nonsense questions).

Undaunted, poor Geppetto continues to work hard, hope for the best, and parent Pinocchio. Poor Geppetto. He needs to form a support group fast. Pinocchio, having no conscience, is given one by the fairy, in the person of Jiminy Cricket. He's a great guide, but unfortunately not integrated by Pinocchio, who continues to plague Geppetto with truancy, running away, and poor peer relations. He lies to the fairy and his nose grows and grows with each obvious untruth. Even though this is a vivid memory for most of us, it only happens once. The social worker (oh, I mean Fairy) bails him out once again, but the young puppet doesn't learn from past mistakes, and continues to choose bad peers. Indulge in abnormal eating patterns at Pleasure Island, and adds fighting and destruction of property to his crimes.

Even his conscience, Jiminy Cricket, in a moment of despair laments "after all I've done for him". His father, even about to face death, continues to feel guilty, and laments in the whale's belly about poor Pinocchio, who was such a good boy. Well, as we all know, the story has a happy ending. After he receives the corrective help he needs (containment in the belly of a whale), his fairy does turn him into a real boy. A very happy ending for all...

Pinocchio is a delightful way for parent and children to discuss some attachment issues in a fun non-threatening way. Rent it, buy it, enjoy it and put some laughter in your life. I give it two thumbs up!

Regina M. Kupecky LSW, MAT